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UNCLAS OTTAWA 000054

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SUBJECT: CANADA COMFORTABLE WITH AFGHANISTAN COMPACT TEXT;
PREPARING FOR LONDON CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 226670

1. (SBU) Summary: The GOC is comfortable with the current version of the Compact, plans to continue its solid commitment to Afghanistan (C\$100 million/US\$85 million in FY2006) and is moving ahead with troop deployments. Canada is committed to success in Afghanistan and constantly monitors assistance levels. However, with federal elections on January 23, no new policy or spending initiatives are possible between now and the London conference. We believe a high-level call from Washington this month urging additional contributions would be counterproductive. End summary.

2. (SBU) In a December 12 meeting, Canadian Agency for International Development (CIDA) Vice President for Asia Hau Sing Tse confirmed that Canada's support for Afghanistan remains strong. He said that "Afghanistan wants to make a big splash" at the London conference, and that the GOC "would begin strategizing" for the conference in early January. (GOC officials confirm that process is underway.) Planning is complicated by the election on January 23, as there may or may not be a new Cabinet by January 31 and if Minister for International Cooperation Aileen Carroll is replaced her successor may not be able to travel so soon after being appointed. The tentative plan, if the Minister is not able to travel, is for Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Harder to lead Canada's delegation to London.

3. (SBU) The GOC came out early with strong support for Afghanistan and has committed funds through FY2009. Contributions this fiscal year (ending March 31) are at C\$100 million (about US\$85 million). A gradual drop-off in aid, based on the assumption the Afghanistan would develop increasing fiscal capability, was planned starting in FY2007, with levels of C\$80 million anticipated next year. Decisions on whether those levels are adequate will be made as the situation in Afghanistan evolves. The GOC remains strongly committed to Afghanistan (a major troop deployment begins February 1) and closely monitors needs. All of Canada's pledged aid is disbursed on schedule, with most of it going through the trust funds.

4. (SBU) A Foreign Affairs Canada counterpart says the GOC is "pretty confident" with the current draft of the Compact and had no comments to submit regarding the most recent version. However, given the Canadian election no new policy or major spending decisions can be made between now and the conference. (Note: A call from Washington encouraging the GOC to do more would before the conference, in our view, indicate a counterproductive lack of faith in a strong partner. End note.)

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